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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: MIDDLE EAST, NORTH KOREA

11. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their coverage July 29-31 on the investigation into "possible irregularities" in the Presidential Office's special state affairs expenditures account; the conclusion of the Taiwan Sustainable Economic Development Conference last Friday and its aftermath; Yankees pitcher Wang Chien-ming, who tossed the first complete-game victory of his major league career Friday; and the prosecutors' decision to seek the death penalty for a man charged with helping to murder his sister-in-law and of sabotaging a railway system to cover up the murder. News coverage also focused on President Chen Shui-bian's son-in-law, who pleaded not guilty as the trial in his insider trading case opened last Friday; and the KMT's Central Standing Committee elections Saturday. In addition, with the exception of the pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, all Chinese-language paper gave extensive coverage July 31 to a housekeeper working for President Chen's daughter at his other residence, who is actually on the payroll of the Presidential Office.

12. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an opinion piece in the pro-unification "United Daily News" said if the war between Israel and Hezbollah continues, the situation in the Middle East will be unfavorable for the United States. An opinion piece in the pro-status quo "China Times" also urged Washington to change its course and policy toward the Middle East. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said terrorism is intolerable in a civilized world. In terms of North Korea, a separate editorial in the "China Post" urged Beijing to stop cuddling up to Kim Jong-il, the "Saddam in the Far East." End summary.

### 13. Middle East

A) "Israel Bombing Lebanon; What Kind of New Middle East Will Be Produced?"

Kao Hsiung-poh, a Taipei strategic commentator, opined in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (7/31):

"It has been over two weeks since Israel launched its strikes against Hezbollah, and the situation seemed to have grown almost irrevocable. U.S. President George W. Bush said this is an opportunity to build a 'New Middle East,' and he may be partially correct. The Middle East may likely put on a new look, but no one is sure whether the new situation in the Middle East will be favorable for the United States. ...

"On the political and psychological levels, the Shiite Hezbollah has demonstrated strong combat capabilities, which have become a new source of confidence and pride for many Arabs. Even the Sunni Arabs who bear a grudge against the Shiites have started to support Hezbollah. The pro-U.S. Arab governments are now facing a serious crisis with regard to their ruling prestige and legitimacy. Countries like Saudi Arabia, which condemned Hezbollah at first, have changed their remarks since the bombings entered the second week. Surely the U.S. can measure and claim that these governments merely sympathize with Hezbollah orally and that they remain pro-U.S. privately.

"But should the war continue, Arabs who are displeased with their pro-U.S. governments will have faith in adopting the combat methods of Hezbollah to fight against the military of the pro-U.S. Arabian countries, whose combat capabilities are far weaker than those of Israel. Those regimes that remain pro-U.S. privately may likely be toppled, while a new Middle East may of course be born, except that it may not be the new Middle East that Bush is hoping for. [Should that happen,] the U.S. attempt to direct global affairs will face more severe barriers and challenges. The neo-conservatives in the United States and brain-trusters in Israel must have been able to foresee such a possible development. As a result, unless Hezbollah is destroyed immediately, it will be very difficult for both Israel and the U.S. to accept a cease-fire agreement, and war will break out at any time even though there is a cease-fire agreement."

B) "United States Should Change Its Course with Regard to the Middle East"

Ying Hui-ming, a cultural commentator currently residing in the U.S., opined in the pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (7/29):

"No matter how left-wingers in the Western world slam U.S. hegemony, it is an undeniable fact that the United States enjoys a unique position in the world. The disaster that Lebanon is suffering now also indicates that the problem will not be solved unless the United States negotiates with the European Union to have Washington directly contact Israel and Lebanon, and have Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia indirectly mediate in between [the warring states]. But the United States' Mideast policy, in which it is the substantive sponsor (of Israel) on the one hand and plays the role of an arbitrator on the surface on the other, is really hypocritical.

"Over the past few years, the U.S. image in the international community has continued to deteriorate; not only its major allies in Europe, like France and Germany, have turned against the United States in terms of the war in Iraq, but anti-U.S. movements in the world also have reached a historical new high. In the final analysis, this is an issue of how to exercise one's power. No one can deny that the United States remains an indispensable force for maintaining world stability. But when it comes to the exercise of power, the U.S. tends to be stubborn and egoistic. Without a doubt, the shock of the September 11 incident was a major factor that changed Americans' ideology, which created a simple, religious sense of good and evil for the host of the White House, who sees a clear distinction between justice and evil and adopts a 'friend or foe' position when it comes to U.S. foreign relations - a kind of moral pride. On this point, the U.S. is actually quite similar to the Islamic fundamentalists. ...

"Now that the war in Iraq has entered its fourth year, the U.S.' international reputation continues to remain low, and its unilateralism also failed to make the world safer. The U.S. has upset the Islamic world, and the arrogance of power it demonstrated in the United Nations and in the world, especially in Europe, has aroused a great wave of enmity and resistance. Evidently, the U.S. approach of using its position as the world's superpower to go beyond international norms and to impose its will on others is not viable. It is essential that the United States change its course, but to judge from the characteristics of the leadership in the White House, the chances are slim for the U.S. to have major policy changes within Bush's term of office."

C) "Terrorism Is Intolerable in a Civilized World"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation; 30,000] editorialized (7/30):

"... The Middle East is an unstable region. As Iran seeks to expand its power and influence, it is in its interest to keep its enemies - not only Israel and America, but also moderate Arab states - off balance. Iran is keeping the pot bubbling in Iraq by arming the Shiite militias and maintaining pressure on Israel by arming and directing both Hamas and Hezbollah. Thus, it can deflect attention from its own plans to become a nuclear power. What Israel and the world need is a stable Middle East, where terrorism is not an instrument of state policy. In the meantime, a secular Israel is confronted by a theocratic Iran and a Syrian regime - both using terror for their own ends. This is intolerable in a civilized world."

#### 4. North Korea

"Cuddling up to a Dictator"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation; 30,000] editorialized (7/29):

"U.S. President George W. Bush was right to call Kim Jong-il's North Korea an 'axis of evil.' And judging from what the reclusive dictator of the pariah state has said and done, Kim is a greater threat to the world than Saddam Hussein was when he ruled Iraq as president. ... Beijing, which holds Pyongyang's lifeline, should stop cuddling up to Kim Jong-il, the Saddam in the Far East. North Korea needs a regime change to get rid of the eccentric and reckless dictator whose kleptocratic regime makes counterfeit greenbacks and sells rockets to rogue states like Iran. Kim is a tyrant who cares less about the plight of his people than the security of his regime. Mainland leader Hu Jintao should think seriously about jettisoning the 'dear leader' and end the Kim dynasty found by his father Kim Il-sung, the 'great leader' who presided over one of the world's most oppressive regimes."

YOUNG